

Glossary

AIR

A

acid precipitation precipitation, such as rain, sleet, or snow, that contains a high concentration of acids, often because of the pollution of the atmosphere

acid shock the sudden runoff of large amounts of highly acidic water into lakes and streams when snow melts in the spring or when heavy rains follow a drought

air pollution the contamination of the atmosphere by wastes from sources such as industrial burning and automobile exhausts

asbestos any of six silicate minerals that form bundles of minute fibers that are heat resistant, flexible, and durable

D

decibel the most common unit used to measure loudness (abbreviation, dB)

P

pH a value that is used to express the acidity or alkalinity (basicity) of a system; each whole number on the scale indicates a tenfold change in acidity; a pH of 7 is neutral, a pH of less than 7 is acidic, and a pH of greater than 7 is basic

primary pollutant a pollutant that is put directly into the atmosphere by human or natural activity

S

secondary pollutant a pollutant that forms in the atmosphere by chemical reaction with primary air pollutants, natural components in the air, or both

sick-building syndrome a set of symptoms, such as headache, fatigue, eye irritation, and dizziness, that may affect workers in modern, airtight office buildings; believed to be caused by indoor pollutants

smog urban air pollution composed of a mixture of smoke and fog produced from industrial pollutants and burning fuels

T

temperature inversion the atmospheric condition in which warm air traps cooler air near Earth's surface